

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

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true God. Thereupon he inaugurated a movement, at first entirely religious, which had in it many of the outward features of Protestant Christianity. Hung himself was later under the instruction of a somewhat eccentric Protestant missionary.

The sect which arose oufl^Hung's teaching, "The Worship-pers of *Shang Ti*" (a Protestant term for God), became especially strong in Kwangsi^and developed at first without much direct leadership from Hung. Into it entered many elements of Chinese provenance: the cult was a bizarre syncretism of misunderstood^ Christianity and native beliefs. In time, by just what process is not entirely clear, but possibly under the guidance of one Chu Chiu-t'ao, who was soon eliminated, collaborating with an early convert of Hung, Feng Yiin-shan, who fell in battle in the summer of 1852,"~"The Worshippers of *Shang Ti*" became a political as well as a religious movement. In the early stages "Triads," members of a revolutionary society which sought to restore the Ming, joined with them. The rebels sought to overthrow the Manchus and establish in their place a new dynasty, to be called T'ai P'ing, or Great Peace, with Hung as its monarch. Hostilities began in 1848 bu^lid not prove especially serious until 1850 and 1851. In 1852 ^ rebels moved northward into Hunan by the familiar route of the Hsiang River, taking several towns. Early in 1853 they captured Wuchang and in March of that year Nanking fell to their arms. At Nanking they established their capital.

In a certain sense the T'ai P'ings were a reforming groups the first wave, largely unintelligent, of that movement which!

sought to save China by reshaping it on lines learned from the West and which in the twentieth century was to work momentous changes. In their effects, however, they were almost entirely destructive.

From another angle the rebellion was a social and economic revolt—an uprising of peasants, the rural proletariat, hand workers, and poorer gentry against landlords, rich peasants, merchants, and wealthy gentry. Indeed, a recent Chinese student of the movement has seen in it chiefly an attempt of non-propertied groups to dispossess the privileged classes. Certainly the ultimate suppression of the T'ai P'ings was due to the support which the Conservative elements of society gave to the imperial government.